

Remarks:

This application has been reviewed carefully in view of the Office Action mailed January 26, 2004 ("the Office Action"). In the Office Action, claims 13 and 14 were objected to as being directed towards identical subject matter. Claims 2, 4, 6-12 and 15 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), as allegedly unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,322,451 to Miura in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,024,643 to Begis.

The above-described objections and rejections are addressed as follows:

A) GENERAL AMENDMENTS

Claims 2 and 10 have been amended to correct minor editorial problems. These amendments do not relate to patentability. Claim 14 has been canceled to address the objection to claims 13 and 14 for being directed towards identical subject matter.

B) CLAIM REJECTIONS UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Applicants appreciate the Examiner considering this additional response, as discussed in a telephone call of April 22, 2004.

Claims 7-8 have been clarified to recite: "... such that the virtual game players appear to the actual game players as actual game players and are provided with different thinking routines." Claim 9 has been similarly clarified. Support for these amendments may be found on page 4, lines 8-11, which recites:

"In particular, the possibility that the game player detects from the game pattern that the competitor is the computer, is further eliminated by preparing in advance plural game programs having different thinking routines and applying different competitive game programs to virtual game player' names."

The examiner has asserted that the appearance of an opponent does not change the operation of the game. However, it should be understood that the players' reactions and strategies change by nature if the players realize their opponents are computerized virtual

players. Therefore, the effective operation of the system taught by Begis should be distinctly different from those of the present invention. Any one of amended claims 7-9 refers to the virtual game players appearing to the actual game players such that the added provision of different thinking routines makes the difference clearer. Further, the underlying character looks different to the players whether the players realize the character is being operated by a computer or not.

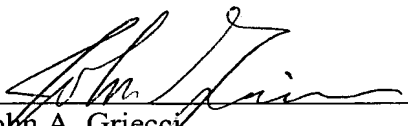
Since neither Miura nor Begis teaches or suggests such features, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 7-9 are in a condition for allowance. Claims 2, 4, 6, 10-13 and 15 all depend from corresponding independent claims 7-9, adding features that further distinguish over the Miura and Begis patents. For this reason and for the reason set forth above with respect to claims 7-9, the rejection of claims 2, 4, 6-12 and 15 under 35 U.S.C. § 103, is improper and should be withdrawn.

C) CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully request that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case.

Respectfully submitted,

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